

Appropriations Committee Hearing

H.B. No. 6659 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025 AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Regarding the proposed budget for DSS

Wednesday, March 1st, 2023

Karen Healy
Member of Keep The Promise Coalition

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Public Health Committee.

My name is Karen Healy and I live in Hartford. I am a person in recovery from mental illness. I spent 24 years of my life in psychiatric hospitals between Hudson River Valley Hospital in New York, and Cedarcrest and CVH in Connecticut. I am now living successfully in the community. I am a member of Keep The Promise Coalition, a member of the Disability Rights Connecticut PAIMI council and the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities. I was chosen to be a part of these advocacy committees because of my story and my lived experience, which I use to help other people.

I'm here today to testify on the proposed budget for DSS.

I'm on Medicare and Medicaid. This means that I have to spend a lot of time on the phone with DSS.

Calling DSS is not an easy process. One time I was on hold for 3 hours and 18 minutes. Another time, they got on the phone with me, put me on hold, and the call dropped after 2 hours and 22 minutes. I've spent hours on the phone with DSS. There have been times that I've physically mailed my paperwork in to a DSS office, with proof that I mailed everything they needed, and they've told me that I'm missing things. My point is that dealing with DSS is already difficult enough.

But now DSS has even more limited hours. This makes things really difficult for me because I can't get in touch with them on my days off from work. It is so **frustrating** to take time off of work to only find out that DDS isn't open, or to get dropped when I've already been on hold for 3 hours. And I'm fortunate to have support from my staff! Imagine if you're someone who doesn't have people to help you with this, or imagine if you have limited phone minutes.

Please make sure that there's enough funding in the DSS budget to keep their offices and phone lines open all week, and there's enough staff so that we don't have to spend hours on the phone!

I'm also on MEDConnect and have previously been on HUSKY C. These are health insurance programs for people with disabilities. HUSKY C has very low income and asset limits. This means that in the past when I've lost my job and working disabled status, I've gotten put on a medical spend down to keep my HUSKY C coverage.

One time I wasn't able to meet my spend down and got billed over \$1300 so for my nursing agency to come in for my weekly med pour. This system basically makes you rack up big medical bills just to keep your coverage. And if you can't do that, you lose coverage for things like home health care. **That's not right.** This year, there are two bills that would remove the income and asset limits for MEDConnect, and increase those limits for HUSKY C.

Please make sure that the increases to these limits are funded, so that we don't have to waste so much money spending down, or lose coverage.

People with disabilities are as human as anyone else, just because I have a mental health condition doesn't mean that I'm different than anybody else. Everyone deserves the opportunity to live a good life in the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today,

Karen Healy
karenhealy73@gmail.com